

BIB105 Biblical Hermeneutics

Unit 3d Word Studies

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Welcome back. Good to be with you again. If you remember last lesson, we took a look at literary context. Today we're going to be getting into word studies. How do we discover meaning through word usage? So let's go ahead and get started. New Testament scholar Gordon Fee says the aim of word study is to try to understand as precisely as possible what the author was trying to convey by his use of *this* word in *this* context. So there is a difference between determining meaning and discovering meaning. Determining, you are putting something into maybe your own ideas or what you've learned. But discovering meaning is you are seeing what is already there and trying to draw that out.

All right. So how do we do that? Well, first of all, let's start with some of the fallacies as it relates to word study. Surprise, surprise. The Bible was **not written in English**. I know that there are some that actually do think that, but no, it was not written in English. It was originally written in Ancient Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. And there are some differences between Modern Greek and Hebrew and Ancient Greek and Hebrew. Just like there's some major differences in reading Shakespearean English to Modern English, there's some differences as well. So of course, some things you got to do a little more digging to find out words and what they mean.

Another one is the **root**. What do I mean by that? The real meaning of a word is found in its root. Well, is it? Sometimes it is. But this can also lead to some silly conclusions. Like for example, the word "butterfly." What is the root of the word "butterfly"? Is it butter or is it fly? Either of those will probably leave you hanging a little bit as far as understanding the essence of butterfly, and so you may get to the wrong conclusion. So just because you're starting to get into concordance study, don't always assume that going back to the root is connected to the word you're looking up.

Another thing is **timeframe**. When we latch on to a late word meaning that's popular at our own time and then read it back into the Bible... So for example, the English word "dynamite" and the Greek word for power which is *dynamis*. So the two words have different meanings, although sounding similar. Sounds like there's a direct connection, but obviously, they didn't have dynamite back in the day, Paul's day, so maybe the word "dynamite" comes from the Ancient Greek term. Maybe not. But don't assume just because it sounds similar that it is. And we know that modern day dynamite tends to destroy while the term *dynamis* in the New Testament context was creative power or healing power. So two different end results from those terms.

And then also **overload**, the idea a word will include all of those senses every time it is used. We'll look at this example in a little more detail later, but for example, the word "spring," it means a lot of different things. It could mean a source of water. It could mean a season of the year. It could mean jumping ability. But it doesn't mean all of those things at the same time. So again, context is going to be the key in understanding which word is actually being used.

Some other fallacies. **Word count** when we insist that the word has the same meaning every time it is used. Word meanings are determined by context, not word counts. So yes, a word may be used 128 times in the New Testament. Well, not all of those 128 may have the exact same meaning. So again, do your homework and make sure that you're not just painting a broad stroke and lumping some things in that shouldn't be there. **Word concept** is another one. And this is the idea that one word doesn't cover the entire concept. So for example, the term "church" in the New Testament, the common word that's

used for that is *ecclesia*. Well, the church is discussed in many other ways in the New Testament other than the term *ecclesia*. The body of Christ, the household of faith, etc. So if you're going to get the full understanding of the church, if you're doing a study on the church, you also want to make sure you're looking at those other terms too. If you're just focusing on *ecclesia*, then of course, look at those different contexts and how *ecclesia* is used.

And then **selective evidence**. Only showing the selective evidence that supports our view. And I think, unfortunately, all of us have done this at one point or another. So it just takes a lot of discipline to not insert your idea of what you think it means. And this is dangerous, and so you got to be super careful to not do this. It could lead to false teaching. So make sure you get the full picture first before coming to conclusions. I think we talked about that. With any kind of literary context, you don't just want to rip one verse out of a passage and say, "Ha-ha. This is what the totality of teaching is on this topic" when that is simply not true. So just make sure again you're not being selective in what you're looking for.

Choose your words carefully. Look for words that are **crucial** to the passage. You can't do a Greek or Hebrew study on every single word of every single verse. Maybe you have the time for that. If you do, great. Or maybe different levels of study. That's awesome. But I would be selective in choosing the word. So look for the key nouns or verbs. Those are great places to start. We already talked about the keywords to look for. Look for **repeated** words. Usually, the author will signal theme words by repeating them. We looked at that. They didn't have, again, ancient highlighters and bold font and italics. They had to repeat words if they wanted to get your attention that this is important. And we looked at that with 2 Corinthians 1 in the topic of comfort.

Also look for **figures of speech**, like metaphors, similes, irony, etc. Not contrast but just metaphors and similes. Since the meaning of figures of speech are not immediately obvious, these are good ones to look at. The classic example there, John 15. "I am the vine. You are the branches." You can do a little study into a vineyard and some of the terminology that's used there, and that may give you some insight into what the Lord was expressing through that.

And then fourth, look for words that are **unclear, puzzling, or difficult**. If you just find that some words are just giving you trouble, then focus on that as you're reading through. Depending on where you are in your English abilities, take a look at those. There's some excellent resources. Again, so many things online. And of course, Blue Letter Bible has plenty of resources for you to dig in a little bit.

The **semantic range**, what is that? Well, first, we need to learn what the word could mean before we decide what it does mean. And remember, we talked about the term "spring" just a couple of slides ago. Well, let's use that as an example. So there's a lot of possible meanings of the term "spring." It could be the season of the year following winter. It could be a metal coil. It could be one's jumping ability. It also could be a source of water. So those are four very different possible meanings for the term "spring." So if your friend says, "I'm ready for some warmer weather. I can't wait for spring to arrive," the context of her statement determines the definition we use for the word "spring," which is clearly talking about the season of the year. So again, go back to context. It's so vitally important to take a look at the context and what's being expressed in the passage, and that will give you a lot of guidance and help you narrow down what the exact meaning of that term is.

Let's take a look at just a sample of what concordance looks like. Maybe you haven't had a chance to interact with concordance at all. So if you're on the Blue Letter Bible site, they have some excellent concordances. If you do a verse search and you click on the Strong's box there, that will give you some of the Strong's numbers which I'm going to show you just a sample of here. So you see the red arrow. We'll get to that here in a second. So the word baptism is used in Matthew 3:7 and it's talking about the baptism of Jesus, which I don't think they got a photo of that. That's just, of course, probably from a film or something. But the number 908, if you look at that, see the red arrow pointing to the 908? This corresponds to the Greek term that's used for baptism in this verse. So Matthew 3:7. "And the Sadducees came to his baptism." So you go to a Greek-English dictionary in the back of the concordance and look up 908. So if you do that, this is what you're going to find. So this is the back of a concordance and the Greek word is *baptisma*, 908. There's the actual Greek letters in writing. And then this is the English transliteration which is *baptisma*. And this is from 907, technically baptism. So if you go back to 907, *baptizo*, which you start looking through, a ceremonial ablution or washing. And so you see that this is a ceremonial washing, not just taking a bath, not just going for a swim. There is definite theological and spiritual purpose to that. So that's just a sample when you are looking up a concordance in the back.

One common mistake that I see with my students when we start getting into concordance work for the first time. Make sure if you're in the New Testament, when you go to the back at the Greek to English dictionary, I've had students make the mistake of they get the number 908 and then we're studying something from Philippians, for example, or from Matthew 3, and they go to 908 but they look at the Hebrew to English, which is actually the Old Testament, and they're looking at the definition. They're like, "This doesn't make any sense at all." It's because they're in the wrong language. So make sure that you don't look in the wrong dictionary. So obviously, if you're doing something from the Old Testament, you're looking at the Hebrew. And something from the New Testament, you're looking at the Greek. So just a real simple mistake but I've seen it happen. I've done it myself as well. So it's just sometimes in our haste, we don't pay attention to what we're doing.

And again, can't stress this enough. Context determines word meaning. It would make no sense for your friend to be referring to talking about the seasons and wanting warmer weather and then talking about a source of water. Maybe. I guess depending where you're at, maybe the rainy season comes in the spring, and so that would fit the context. But for the most part, it's pretty clear that talking about warmer weather, we're looking for that transition in season. So context determines word meaning. Make sure we stay sharp with that. It's just, again, a great habit. Literary context, historical, cultural context, and then now with the words. You just can't get away from it. Context is going to be a part of every study that you do.

So hopefully this is helpful. The next lesson we'll get into is going to be on meaning and applications. Now we've done some great foundational work in getting the observations down. Now let's talk about where do we go from there? So once we get our observations and get the information we need, let's see how we go with interpretation and then ultimately application.